

VOSEO IN THE WORKPLACE, STREET, AND SOCIAL GATHERING DOMAINS OF THREE SOCIETIES COSTA RICA, HONDURAS, AND NICARAGUA

Alberto Rey

Howard University

Introduction

Of the many possible linguistic variations that may exist in one linguistic community, the subject pronouns of address forms are probably the ones that can best reflect the social relationships that may exist between speakers and the corresponding effect of society on the degree or type of linguistic variation. The second person, singular subject pronouns in Spanish are *Usted*, *Tú*, and *Vos*. The functions and geographical/ social distribution of each of these pronouns have been the focus of study for many researchers.

Kany (1945) gives a quite detailed history and distribution of the *You* subject pronoun variation. The use of *Vos* is explained from a historical perspective to be a diffusion of the original *Vos*, from a plural form to a singular form, as a reaction to the extreme informality of the *Tú* form. Rona (1967) uses mailed questionnaires on the usage of these pronouns, the morphology of the verb forms, and the possible phonological variation of the verb forms to describe the *voseo* and *tuteo* throughout Spanish America. Lambert and Tucker (1976: 122 - 142) find in their study of preteen children that the highest number of significant differences in the pronoun usage is in the Catholic-Jewish comparisons, followed by the male-female Catholic comparisons, and then the male-female Jewish comparisons. Pérez Urdaneta (1981) examines the *You* pronoun and verbal form variation that previous researchers have reported. He discusses the importance of social variables in determining which of these pronouns will be used in a given situation, but does not go into much detail about specific subject variables. The *Vos/ Tú* alternation with *Usted* is described as one of degrees of formality - *Usted* = more formality, *Vos* = more informality, and *Tú* = less informality.

Castro-Mitchell (1991) analyzes the *Usted* and *Vos* usage in Honduras. One of the findings of this study is that the solidarity function varies with the S's socioeconomic status and the type of language structure. Solé (1970) presents a detailed analysis of the *Usted/ Tú/ Vos* variation of middle class speakers in Argentina, Perú, and Puerto Rico. Solé's selection of these countries is based on their representation of the three types of society prevalent in Latin America: a modern society, a traditional society with an aristocratic inclination in transition, and an agrarian society, respectively. Puerto Rico, representing an agrarian social structure, displays a more 'static' variation of the pronouns than the other two types of societies. It is this study that motivated the present investigator to undertake the comparative analysis of the *voseo* of Costa Rica, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

Purpose

The present investigation sets out to determine the similarities and differences of the *voseo* in three different types of societies - Costa Rica, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Costa Rica can be considered to have a modern and industrialized society, due to its stability and increased economic development, especially in the tourism industry. Honduras has a basically agrarian and traditional social structure. Nicaragua, due to its recent political and social changes, can be considered an agrarian society in transition. Do the traditional gender roles of the addressee and speaker differ due to the different social structures of these three countries? Is there greater or lesser *voseo*? What are the social correlates of the pronoun variation? Are there greater or fewer significant S variable X Pronoun variation correlations? The answers to these questions will give us a clearer view of a very complex sociolinguistic variation.

Research Methodology

The data for the present comparative study was obtained by means of interviews of the residents of the capital city in each of the three countries - San Jose (Costa Rica), Tegucigalpa (Honduras), and Managua (Nicaragua). The instrument consists of two sections: (a) the informant's personal background information and (b) the informant's use of *Usted*, *Tú*, and *Vos* in different domains of interaction. The informant background section includes questions on the S's age, marital status, birthplace, neighborhood, level of education, income, parents' occupation, family origin, children, etc. The pronoun usage section consists of questions designed to elicit the pronoun variation depending on the social/situational variation or domain of interaction. For the present discussion the Workplace, Street, and Social Gathering Domains of Interaction are presented. The situations in the Workplace Domain include a wide variety of addressees. Twelve addressees are presented to the Ss in this domain, older male/ female and younger male/ female subordinates, superiors, and equals in their place of employment. The Street Domain has a total of 24 situations/addressees. These situations include male/female older/younger individuals one might meet while outside the home or workplace in a variety of situations, ranging from contact with police officers and waiters or waitresses to doctors and professors. The final domain of interaction analyzed in this article is that of a Social Gathering/ Party. Eight addressees are included in this section, older/ younger male/ female acquaintances and strangers. The responses of the S's usage of each of the three subject pronouns are recorded on a five-point scale from "Never" to "Always" for each addressee/situation in each domain. The interviewers are local students and/or professionals in each city presented (from the Universidad Autónoma de Honduras, the Universidad Autónoma de Managua, and the Universidad Estatal a Distancia in San José). Availability and cluster (by neighborhood type/level) sampling techniques are followed for the data collection. A total of 637 Ss is included in the final data analysis of the *Usted/ Vos/ Tú* pronoun variation in these three countries (Costa Rica - 176, Honduras - 216, and Nicaragua - 245).

A simple frequency distribution analysis of the S's response of his or her subject pronoun usage is performed to determine the frequency/percentage of usage of each pronoun for each addressee. To avoid the confusion possible from the presentation of percentages of the five points/degree of usage for each of the three pronouns and for the sake of clarity of focus, only the percentages of "Always" usage of the *Vos* pronoun will be discussed. To study the relationship that may exist between the S's

background (S variables) and his or her *You* pronoun usage (on a five-point scale), the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient is quite useful for describing this type of correlation. This statistical procedure is used in the present analysis to determine the social correlates (the S variables) of the *You* subject pronoun variation (*voseo*) in the Workplace, Street, and Social Gathering Domains of these three countries. In the presentation of the social correlates of the *voseo* in these countries to follow, only the correlations that are significant statistically at $\leq .05$ and $\leq .01$ are presented.

Results

Although the main thrust of the original investigations in each of these three countries is on the social correlations with the *You* (*Usted*, *Tu*, and *Vos*) subject pronoun variation, the S's reported "Always" usage of *Vos* is presented in the discussions to follow. The percentage of *Vos* usage, as opposed to the *Tú* usage, is selected due to the national *voseo* one finds in each of these countries. The first four tables to be presented display this "Always" usage in the Workplace, Street Non-Professionals, Street Professionals, and Social Gathering Domains. These four tables will also include an overall *voseo* ranking or score. To arrive at the overall *voseo* ranking for these domains of interaction, a value of three is given for the highest percentage of usage for a particular addressee, a two for the second highest, and a one for the lowest percentage of "Always" *Vos* usage. By a simple addition of these individual addressee "scores", one can arrive at the overall ranking for a domain of interaction and better determine which country has the highest *voseo* for a particular domain of interaction. The *voseo* score for each domain of interaction can be found at the bottom of each table. The fifth and final table displays the total number of significant correlations (at $\leq .05$ and $\leq .01$ levels) of the S variables with the *Usted/ Vos/ Tú* variation in the three domains of interaction presented in this report.

In the Workplace Domain table that follows one sees a trend in the three countries of a greater *voseo* toward equals than toward superiors or subordinates, when the sex and age of the addressees are constant in the comparisons. This is best evidenced in the comparison of the *voseo* toward younger male equals (20%-Honduras, 66%-Nicaragua, and 13%-Costa Rica) vs. younger male superiors (7%-Honduras, 36%-Nicaragua, and 7%-Costa Rica). This *voseo* of solidarity is somewhat extended toward subordinates, but not toward superiors. There also appears to be a "youth" *voseo* in this domain of interaction, as evidenced by a greater *Vos* usage toward younger addressees than older addressees of the same sex within each occupational category.

Table I Vos usage - Workplace Domain

Addressees	Honduras	Nicaragua	Costa Rica
Subordinates			
Older Male	6	12	7
Younger Male	14	52	8
Older Female	0	7	6
Younger Female	10	44	6
Equals			
Older Male	14	30	15
Younger Male	20	66	13
Older Female	8	21	12
Younger Female	20	57	13
Superiors			
Older Male	2	11	6
Younger Male	7	36	7
Older Female	1	7	5
Younger Female	5	11	5
<i>Voseo Scores</i>	18	36	20

In terms of amount of *Vos* usage, Nicaragua has by far the greatest amount of *voseo* for these three countries. The greatest difference in the *Vos* usage is toward younger male addressees in each of the three job categories. This difference is especially evident in the *Vos* usage toward younger male subordinate addressees, with almost seven times more *voseo* in Nicaragua than in Costa Rica. The highest *voseo* score in this domain of interaction is found in Nicaragua, followed by Costa Rica, and then Honduras.

The results of the Street Domain are presented in two tables, Professionals and Non-Professionals. This division is based on the amount of education or the preparation of the addressees in this domain of interaction. The following table displays the findings for the professional addressees in the Street Domain. Overall, there is much less *Vos* usage toward these professional addressees in Table II A than one finds in the Workplace Domain. Even with the much lower *voseo* in this domain of interaction, there again appears to be a youth *voseo* in all three countries. Also, Nicaragua again has the highest *voseo* score, followed by Costa Rica, and then Honduras.

Table II A Vos usage - Street Domain, Professionals

Addressees	Honduras	Nicaragua	Costa Rica
Doctor			
Older Male	1	2	3
Younger Male	4	9	4
Older Female	0	2	2
Younger Female	2	8	3
Govt Official			
Older Male	1	1	2
Younger Male	7	20	3
Older Female	1	1	2
Younger Female	4	23	3
Education			
Male Professor	1	2	3
Female Professor	1	2	3
<i>Voseo Scores</i>	15	26	23

In Table II B, which follows, one sees much greater *Vos* usage toward non-professionals than toward the professional addressees displayed in the previous table. The trend observed in the previous tables of a youth *voseo* is again present toward these non-professional addressees. However, the young - old differential is much greater than in the previous table, more than sixteen times more *Vos* usage toward younger female salesclerks than older female salesclerks. Once again Nicaragua has the highest *voseo* score toward these addressees. Although Costa Rica has the second-highest *voseo* score, note that toward salesclerk addressees the *Vos* usage is much greater in Honduras than in Costa Rica.

Table II B Vos usage - Street Domain, Non-Professionals

Addressees	Honduras	Nicaragua	Costa Rica
Police			
Older Male	1	4	1
Younger Male	4	20	1
Older Female	1	3	2
Younger Female	2	18	1
Salesclerks			
Older Male	3	6	4
Younger Male	25	68	5
Older Female	2	4	3
Younger Female	21	67	5
Restaurant Service			
Older Male	2	4	4
Younger Male	6	34	5
Older Female	2	4	6
Younger Female	5	34	6
Taxi Driver			
Older M/F	1	5	7
Younger M/F	6	34	7
<i>Voseo Scores</i>	20	40	26

The table for the Social Gathering Domain in the following page displays the same youth *voseo* of the previous tables. As for the average percentage of *voseo* in this domain of interaction (percentage of *Vos* usage for all addressees divided by the number of addressees), Nicaragua and Honduras have a higher average percentage of *Vos* usage toward these addressees than one finds in any other domain of interaction. Also, Nicaragua once again has the highest *voseo* score for this domain of interaction. However, Honduras has the second highest *voseo* score, not Costa Rica, as has been the case for the previously discussed domain of interaction.

Table III Vos usage - Social Gathering Domain

Addressees	Honduras	Nicaragua	Costa Rica
Acquaintance			
Older Male	16	16	8
Younger Male	35	75	13
Older Female	11	15	9
Younger Female	29	74	13
Stranger			
Older Male	2	5	5
Younger Male	6	44	6
Older Female	2	4	3
Younger Female	6	44	5
<i>Voseo Scores</i>	15	24	12

The final area presented in this comparative analysis is that of the statistically significant S variable by pronoun variation correlations for the different domain of interaction. One finds in Table IV many differences in the number and type of S variables that show significant correlations with the *Usted/Tú/Vos* pronoun variation in these three countries. At first glance, one sees that the total number of significant correlations is quite different for each country. Honduras has the greatest number of significant correlations, almost three times more correlations than the country with the least number of significant correlations, Costa Rica. Nicaragua falls somewhere in the middle, with almost twice as many significant correlations as Costa Rica.

Table IV Number of Correlation Coefficients - Variable X Domain of Interaction

	Workplace CR H N			Street CR H N			Party CR H N			TOTALS CR H N		
Sex	0	3	5	0	18	9	0	6	1	0	27	15
Neighborhood	1	6	5	5	29	16	4	6	2	10	41	23
Age	0	5	1	4	7	16	6	13	10	10	25	27
Birth-Subject	1	0	7	6	3	4	1	1	1	8	4	12
-Father	0	8	6	0	6	1	1	1	1	1	15	8
-Mother	1	0	0	5	3	1	0	1	1	6	4	2
Occup Subject	0	1	4	3	9	11	0	6	3	3	16	18
-Father	0	2	1	3	14	14	4	8	0	7	24	15
-Mother	1	1	0	0	1	3	0	3	1	1	5	4
-Spouse	0	3	3	1	16	5	0	3	0	1	22	8
Income-Subject	2	0	0	15	22	0	2	2	2	19	24	2
-Family	14	7	8	17	12	6	0	2	2	31	21	16
Educ-Subject	1	5	2	1	29	15	0	6	2	2	40	19
-Parents	0	1	2	3	12	7	0	8	2	3	21	13
-Spouse	0	3	1	2	11	5	0	5	0	2	19	6
Children	1	3	1	1	6	1	0	4	1	2	13	3
FL-Spoken	3	1	8	12	21	21	0	5	5	15	27	34
Travel	3	4	2	4	4	13	0	3	5	7	11	20
Social Class	0	9	4	0	34	10	0	9	4	0	52	18
				FINAL TOTALS						128	370	240

KEY. CR = Costa Rica

H = Honduras

N = Nicaragua

As for the importance of specific S variables for the pronoun variation in each of these countries, one finds some interesting similarities within particular domains of interaction. Family income is among the top three S variables in the Workplace Domain for all three countries. One finds other similarities in the S variable hierarchy of importance in that the S's number of foreign languages spoken is among the "top three" in the Street and Workplace Domains in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Also, the father's occupation is among the top three S variables in the Social Gathering Domain in Costa Rica and Honduras. There are also similarities in the overall totals for the significant correlations for all three domains of interaction. One finds that the variable of the S's neighborhood is among the most important S variables in Honduras and Nicaragua and the number of foreign languages spoken by the S is among the most important in Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

Discussion of Results

There are both differences and similarities in the *voseo* of Costa Rica, Honduras, and Nicaragua in the domains of interaction presented in this report. The similarity is found in the types of *voseo* present for the three countries. One finds a greater *Vos* usage toward younger addressees than older addressees in the three domains of interaction. This youth *voseo* is most pronounced toward nonprofessionals in the Street Domain, especially in Nicaragua where there is more than fifteen times more *Vos* usage toward younger salesclerks than toward older salesclerks. In the Workplace Domain there is also a *voseo* of solidarity in all three countries, with a greater *Vos* usage toward equals than toward subordinates or superiors, when the gender and age of the addressees are constant in the comparisons. It appears, therefore, that the type or function of the *voseo* is universal for these domains of interaction. This similarity in the function of the *voseo* was also found to be present in the Family and Neighborhood Domains by this investigator for these three countries. In those domains of interaction, this researcher found both a *voseo* of intimacy and a sexual *voseo* for these countries. The sexual *voseo* found in the Neighborhood Domain was one of a much greater *Vos* usage toward female addressees than male addressees, possibly what one would consider being of "superficial intimacy." More detailed analysis of the *voseo* in other countries might yield more universal functions for this pronoun usage.

In terms of the differences in the *voseo* of Costa Rica, Honduras, and Nicaragua, the degree or amount of *Vos* usage and the S variable hierarchy of importance are quite different for the domains of interaction in the present report. The much higher "Always" usage and *voseo* scores for all three of the domains of interaction for Nicaragua can be considered as a function of the transitional nature of that country's social structure. Honduras had the lowest *voseo* scores in the Workplace and Street Domains. This finding for Honduras is similar to the Sole (1970) study, in which Puerto Rico had a more "static" variation of the subject pronouns, attributed to the agrarian nature of Puerto Rican society. This, however, was not so for the Family and Neighborhood Domains discussed elsewhere by this researcher. For those domains of interaction, Costa Rica had the lowest *voseo* scores. That "static" variation in Costa Rica was attributed not so much to the societal structure, but to a hyper-correction of the pronoun usage in Family and Neighborhood domains of interaction.

The S variable by pronoun variation significant correlations are quite different for these three countries, in terms of both the number and the hierarchy of importance for those correlations. For the domains of interaction in the present report, Costa Rica has, by far, the fewest significant correlations, followed by Nicaragua, and then Honduras (with almost three times more significant correlations than Costa Rica). It seems that Honduras, with the lowest *voseo* scores, has the greatest sociolinguistic complexity for this pronoun variation. Since Costa Rica is the country farthest from an agrarian social structure in this study and it has the least number of significant correlations, one could say that the sociolinguistic complexity of this variation decreases as the social structure becomes less agrarian based.

The hierarchy of importance of specific S variables for each country shows both differences and similarities. The number of foreign languages spoken by the S (for Nicaragua and Costa Rica) and the S's neighborhood (for Honduras and Nicaragua) are in the "top three" for two countries in the final totals of significant correlations. It would appear that the society in transition (Nicaragua) has S variables of similar importance for the pronoun variation with the other two societal types, possibly

a type of "bridge" between these two countries. This could be a bridge due to geography (since it is geographically between Costa Rica and Honduras) or one due to the type of societal structure present, a society in transition between an agrarian society and an industrialized, modern society.

Now, in terms of the overall totals for the significant correlations for each country, the differences in the hierarchical importance of the S variables are somewhat difficult to explain. In Costa Rica family income, S income, and number of foreign languages spoken by the S are the S variables that show the most significant correlations with the pronoun variation. The influence of the income variables and the number of foreign languages spoken by the S can be attributed to the high level of industrialization and contact with foreigners involved with tourism and business that one finds in Costa Rica. The S variables with the largest number of significant correlations in Honduras are the ones that one might expect from the most traditional of the three countries under discussion - S's neighborhood, social class, and education. That is to say, that these S variables are generally thought of as very important for a traditional, agrarian social structure as is found in Honduras. Finally, Nicaragua, as previously mentioned, has two of the "top three" S variables in common with the other two types of social structures, which can be considered as a bridge between its neighbors, geographically and/or across types of social structures.

The comparison of the *voseo* of Costa Rica, Honduras, and Nicaragua presented at this time has hopefully added to our knowledge of this subject pronoun variation. The similarities (in function and S variable correlations) and differences (degree or amount of *voseo* and S variable correlations) one finds in the *voseo* of these countries further attest to the complexity of this sociolinguistic variation. Further research of the *voseo* in other societies or countries in Central America would give us a clearer picture of the effect that society can have on this very interesting and complex sociolinguistic variation.

References

- Castro-Mitchell, Amanda. 1991. *Usted porque no lo conozco o porque lo quiero mucho? The semantic functions of Usted in Honduran Spanish*. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Pittsburgh.
- Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano. 1965. San Jose, Costa Rica. Universidad de Costa Rica. *El sistema educativo en Honduras. Situación actual y perspectivas*.
- Jaramillo, June A. 1990. Domain constraints on the use of *tú* and *usted*. Spanish in the United States. Sociolinguistic Issues, ed. by John J. Bergen, 14-22. Wash., D.C.: Georgetown UP.
- Florez, Luis. 1975. *Del español hablado en Colombia*. Bogota: Instituto Caro y Cuervo.
- Kany, Charles E. 1945. *American-Spanish syntax*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- Lambert, Wallace E. and G. Richard Tucker. 1976. *Tu, vous, usted-a social psychological study of address patterns*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- Marín, Diego. 1972. El uso de *Tú* y *Usted* en el español actual. *Hispania* 55: 904-908.
- Montes Giraldo, Jose J. 1985. *Estudios sobre el español de Colombia*. Bogota: Instituto Caro y Cuervo.
- Nie, Norman H., C. Hadlai Hull, Jean G. Jenkins, Karin Steinbrenner and Dale H. Brent. 1975. *Statistical package for the social sciences*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. 1969. *Statistics of the occupational and educational structure of the labour force in 53 countries*. Paris.

- Paez Urdaneta, Iraset 1981 *Historia y geografía hispanoamericana del voseo* Caracas La Casa de Bello
- Rona, José Pedro 1967 *Geografía y morfología del voseo* Porto Alegre Pontificia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul
- Sole, Yolanda R 1970 *Correlaciones socio-culturales del uso del tu/vos y usted en la Argentina, Perú y Puerto Rico* *Thesaurus* 25 161-195
- Torres, Alfredo 1986 *Acerca del voseo culto de Chile* *Hispania* 69 677-683
- 1991 *Formulas de tratamiento de segunda persona singular en el español de Chile* *Hispania* 74 1068-1076
- Uber, Diane Ringer 1985 *The dual function of usted* *Forms of address in Bogota, Colombia* *Hispania* 68 388-392